

Beyond the Ecumenical: Pan-Deism?

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A new phenomenon in religion is becoming more prominent as each year passes. It is a syncretist movement aiming at the union of all those who believe in God. This phenomenon goes far beyond the so-called ecumenical movement, which strives to unify all those who call themselves Christian. Before the Roman church took the ecumenical movement seriously, she generally alluded to it disparagingly as pan-Protestantism. The new movement is blessed by some of the hierarchs of the Roman church as the *pro Deo* (for God) movement.

To promote to the full the objective of this new trend, the Vatican has this year set up an organization as yet in embryo, a Secretariat for Non-Christian Religions. This new establishment, which will operate in Rome under the direction of Paolo Cardinal Marella as another arm of the Curia, parallels the Secretariat for Christian Unity.

It is interesting to note in this connection the changing vocabulary of the Vatican. Some recent popes have made much use of the terms *Il Padre Commune* ("The Common Father") and *La Casa del Padre Commune* ("The Father's House"—the Vatican) in their appeals to bring Christians back home. In establishing this new activity, the Pope now describes Rome as the *Patria Commune*, the "Common Fatherland" for all believers. However difficult it may be for Muslims, Buddhists, and Jews to regard Rome as their "common fatherland," the idea is that the new secretariat will make them feel that they now "belong." It seemed as though Paul VI was reaching beyond the history of the papacy and the Roman church to the universality of the old Roman Empire embracing many nations when he said:

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"By the institution of this organism, no pilgrim will henceforth be a stranger in Rome, where the Church faithful to her history and her catholic faith shall always be the 'common fatherland.'"

The activities of the *pro Deo* group, which no doubt paved the way for the new secretariat, seem to have been chiefly confined to organizing international banquets, called *agapes* or love-feasts, thereby changing the character of the meetings of the early Christians, which were certainly closed to non-Christians.

FRATERNIZING WITH THE EAST

To those familiar with the history of Roman Catholic missions in recent centuries, the idea of fraternization with oriental religions is not completely new. Throughout the seventeenth century and well into the eighteenth a bitter controversy raged between certain Jesuit missionaries and their opponents about what is sometimes called "Chinese rites." In fact, the desire to transform Catholicism into an oriental cult, though within certain limits, began with the Jesuit missionary De Nobili early in the seventeenth century. He assumed the saffron robe of the monk, observed Brahmanic rites and fasts, and tried to be as much like a Brahman as possible. In China the Jesuit missionaries later attempted to use similar methods in order to make themselves as completely oriental as possible.

Despite fierce opposition, the methods of De Nobili were approved for a time. But all these attempts to "naturalize" Roman missions in the East were finally suppressed by a bull of Pope Benedict XIV, *Omnium Sollicitudinem*, in 1744. After this decree, the Roman missions in the East were destined to become like so many Latin colonies planted on foreign soil. This has often been deplored in modern times, and no doubt the recent Vatican approach may be seen as a return to the "assimilation" attempts of previous centuries.

Evangelicals do not always realize how spiritually satisfying to some Roman Catholic intellectuals is the idea of assimilating and adapting all human cultures—and to some extent all religions—inside one vast theo-

cratic Roman Catholic Church. Karl Adam in his *Spirit of Catholicism* has tried to show how much this is a part of the modern Roman *Weltanschauung*.

An increased impetus in this direction comes from a growing consciousness that the Catholic-Protestant divisions seem to be lessening and that many world cultures are still outside the range of Catholicism, especially of a Catholicism identified with Western culture. Some have begun to ask if African and Asiatic cultures might have something in their philosophy, theology, and mysticism, as well as in the less difficult fields of music and art, that might be included under the name "Catholic." Certain Roman apologists might boldly assert that these cultures "belong" to the Catholic idea.

Teilhard de Chardin, chiefly through his posthumous book, *The Phenomenon of Man*, has become the prophet of a new evolutionary outlook, centering the climax of world development in the formation of a new creation in Christ. This would also imply for some—among them, no doubt, Arnold Toynbee with his synthesis of world history—the idea of a convergence of religions, however repellent this might seem to many.

I first came upon this extension of ecumenism into pan-deism among some Roman Catholic scholars interested primarily in the "reunion of the churches," Roman, Orthodox, Anglican. This was just before Pius XI brought out his encyclical, *Mortalium Animos* (1928), which was seemingly directed against the World Council of Churches and the ecumenical movement generally. These were condemned as "pan-Protestantism." Yet even then a number of Roman scholars had already made public the idea that the Church Catholic is "Jewish, is Moslem, is Buddhist, is Taoist." The idea behind this was the concept of a true catholic or universal order of religion that must be able to include the highest aspirations and achievements of all religions and cultures. It was felt that the same ecumenical spirit that sought to bring together the historically separated Christian churches should be able to reach out to the religions of Asia, of Africa through Islam, and to the Jewish diaspora.

An obvious bond with Jews and Muslims through the Old Testament was recognized. The "Our Father" of the Christian was also the God of the Jews and the Allah of the Muslims. It was explained that to unite with Hindus and Buddhists, Christians should explore the hidden reality—the "ultimate reality," the infinite, the absolute, the everlasting, the all-pervading spirit that marks the religious experience of the Orient. Many felt that Western culture has lost the sense of a living and inspiring presence in intimate religious experience and "knowing," because this is not regarded as something for the ordinary believer but is rather the privilege of an esoteric few, called "mystics." Some religious observers in the Roman church have believed that just as contact with non-Roman churches might have a salutary and broadening influence on many Roman Catholics, so also for people of Western culture, contact with the religious experience of the East might lead to the vitalizing effects of the "inner light" and

the "inner presence," which seem so essential a part of the oriental religious outlook.

Surprisingly, some have seriously declared that this universal outreach should include even atheists, on the plea that many so-called atheists are in reality seekers after God in their own perverse way.

WHAT IS THE GOAL?

We may perhaps ask what is the ultimate aim of the Curia in promoting the pan-deist movement. Undoubtedly, certain Roman Catholic thinkers have a sincere desire to promote greater unity and peace in the world. Such thinkers envisage ecumenism as a fulfillment of Christ's prayer, "That they all may be one." Their beliefs and education convince them that unity implies submission to one authority, and this submission is taken to be a divine mandate to include everybody in the one sheepfold of the pope. The same thinkers accept as a natural prerogative Rome's promotion of world unity by any religious means whatever. Thus they do not necessarily discern in Rome's ecumenism and pan-deism a project for world dominion. Yet this danger certainly exists.

Evangelicals should remember that the bull of Pope Boniface VIII, *Unam Sanctam*, still exists and is generally taught as an infallible utterance in Roman seminaries. In this bull the pope proclaimed that to attain salvation every soul must be subject to the Roman pontiff. He also promulgated the doctrine of the "two swords"—the spiritual and the temporal—by which he affirmed that the pope as vicar of Christ had supreme power not only in religion but in all things temporal.

Evangelicals should also remember that Paul VI was crowned in June, 1963, with the same symbolical emblem of dominion invented by Boniface VIII, and with the admonition (in Latin): "Remember that thou art the ruler of kings and the father of princes."

And finally, evangelicals should not forget that the basic justification for the world ambitions of the papacy as interpreted by the Curia is still a misinterpretation of Jeremiah 1:10: "See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant."

On August 6, 1964, Paul VI published his first encyclical, *Ecclesiam Suam*. Several passages in this lengthy message confirm all that has been outlined above about Vatican approaches to the great non-Christian religions. The following is the most relevant:

Then we see another circle around us. This too is vast in its extent, yet it is not too far away from us. It is made up of the men who above all adore the one, supreme God whom we too adore. We refer to the children, worthy of our affection and respect, of the Hebrew people. They are faithful to the religion which we call that of the Old Testament. Then there are the adorers of God according to the conception of monotheism, especially the Moslem religion, deserving of our admiration for all that is true and good in their worship of God. Then there are also the followers of the great Afro-Asian religions. . . . □